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The Rattlesnake in Maine

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In Clifford H. Pope's *Snakes Alive and How They Live* (1940, p. 135), it is stated that Michigan alone of the United States can boast of being free of deadly poisonous snakes, only the massasauga being found there. Curran and Kauffeld write, in *Snakes and Their Ways* (1937, p. 53), that Maine has the distinction of being the only state having no poisonous snakes, the rattler and the copperhead not having been recorded from there. Since a conflict of opinions as to whether or not *Crotalus horridus* exists in Maine has actually gone on for decades, now seems an appropriate time to review the question in some detail.

James Sullivan, in *History of the District of Maine* (1795, p. 12), apparently gives the first definite statement by saying that the rattler was present but "very rarely seen in the district." William Williamson, in *History of Maine* (1832, vol. 1, p. 170), speaks of "great numbers" having been taken at Rattlesnake Mountain in the town of Raymond, north of Sebago Lake, in what is now Cumberland County. He says that none were ever seen east of the Kennebec River. Benjamin Fogg, a physician in Portland, published a "List of Reptiles and Amphibians Found in the State of Maine" (*Proc. Portland Soc. Nat. Hist.*, vol. 1, 1862, pt. 1, p. 86). This purely nominal catalog listed the rattler. He later revised and annotated his list, had the nomenclature checked by Verrill, and it was included in the *Seventh Annual Report of the Secretary, Maine Board of Agriculture* (1862, p. 141-142) as part of the "scientific survey" of the state. The rattler appears thus (p. 141): "Rare. In the southwest parts of the State only." As Fogg's lists were based on his own herpetological collections, of Maine material, which were presented to the Portland Society of Natural History on February 20, 1862, and a list of specimens in the collection reveals that a rattler was among the lot, we have here the only known Maine specimen that ever found its way into a museum. It was entered without locality or date of capture, but Fogg is known to have collected in southwestern Maine over a period of years. Unfortunately the

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collection was lost in the great Portland fire of 1866. Previous to its loss, however, Professor A. E. Verrill had examined the specimen preparatory to publishing his "Catalogue of Reptiles and Batrachians Found in the Vicinity of Norway, Oxford County, Maine" (*Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist.*, vol. 9, 1863, p. 195-199). He listed the rattler as "Rare" and mentioned it as occurring in the towns of Albany and Raymond, but states that he never "detected" it east of the Androscoggin River.

Later reports in the herpetological literature all stem from Fogg's and Verrill's papers-although of many publications examined only Gloyd actually cites them. Some of the authors who include Maine in the Rattler's range are:

COPE, *Rep. U. S. Nat. Miss.* (1898), 1900, p. 1187.

STEJNEGER AND BARBOUR, *Check List N. Amer. Amph. Reps.*, 1917, p. 109; 1923, p. 124; 1933, p. 135; 1939, p. 148; 1943, p. 186.

BABCOCK, *Bull. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist.*, no. 26, 1921, p. 6; *ibid.*, no. 35, 1925, p. 7; *Boston Soc. Nat. Hist. Guide* no. 1, 1929, p. 28 "has been reported . . ."

DITMARS, *Snakes of the World*, 1931, p. 96 "nearly or quite free of them . . ."; p. 114 "southern Maine . . .".

KLAUBER, *Trans. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist.*, vol. 8, 1936, no. 20, p. 246, 253.

DITMARS, *Field Book of N. Amer. Snakes*, 1939, p. 68.

GLOYD, *Chicago Acad. Sci., Special Publ.* no. 4, 1940, p. 171, 174, 177.

SCHMIDT AND DAVIS, *Field Book of Snakes*, 1941, p. 301.

Gloyd (*op. cit.*, p. 176) writes: "The only records of its occurrence in Maine (Verrill, 1863) are also old and so far as known to me unrepresented by specimens."

I do not find Maine included in the rattler's range in Ditmars *The Reptile Book* (1907), nor in his more recent revision of it, *Reptiles of North America* (1936).

It is unfortunate that authors have overlooked two excellent papers by the late Arthur H. Norton, for many years curator of the Portland Society of Natural History. These are "The Rattlesnake in Maine" (*Maine Naturalist*, vol. 9, 1929, no. 1, p. 25-28) and "Notes on the History of Herpetology in Maine" (*ibid.*, no. 2, p. 53-68). In these papers it is shown quite clearly that no reliable report of a Maine rattler had come to light for years and, in fact, that in scientific literature published reports of its occurrence are all based on Fogg and Verrill.

One other point is worth mentioning. The late C. A. Stephens, M.D., devotes a chapter of his book, *My Folks in Maine* (Norway, Maine: Old Squire's Bookstore, 1934, p. 186-191), to "The Last Pair of Rattlers" found near the Stephens farm on the western shore of Lake Penesseewassee, in the town of Norway, Oxford County, 1842. While this book is somewhat fanciful at

times, investigation has revealed that there is much in it of factual natural history. Thus we may accept Stephens' account of the rattler's occurrence in 1842. It is further supported by the fact that some twenty years later Verrill (1863) listed it from the same county.

Quite regularly some Maine newspaper reports a rattlesnake. The writer once investigated one of these and actually found one—a diamond rattler (*C. adamanteus*)—apparently thrown out of an automobile and picked up frozen on a highway in December. All other attempts to trace reports have revealed either milk snakes or nothing.

In view of the data here presented it seems best—unless someone should collect another specimen—to consider the rattlesnake (*C. horridus*) as having *formerly* occurred in Oxford, Cumberland, and probably York Counties, Maine, though none are known to have been captured since about 1860. There are more recent captures for Carroll County, New Hampshire, across the state line, but the latest of these (so far as I am aware) is several decades old.